

Message

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Sent: 5/7/2012 3:37:12 PM
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Subject: NEWS UPDATES: EPA Flags New Chemicals For IRIS, Defers Study On Priority Compounds (Inside EPA)

EPA Flags New Chemicals For IRIS, Defers Study On Priority Compounds

Posted: May 4, 2012

EPA is moving forward with a host of controversial new and pending Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) chemical assessments that form the basis of many regulatory decisions despite a comprehensive review of the program that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is preparing to launch.

In a [Federal Register notice](#) slated for publication May 7, EPA lists 15 new assessments it is planning to launch in the coming years, including several for high-profile substances such as siloxanes, which are used to make medical devices, mercury; manganese; vanadium; and others.

The notice also lists 52 assessments already underway at the request of program and regional offices, though the agency said it is deferring decisions on several high-profile assessments, including those for the plastic additive bisphenol-A and lead until after other federal programs assess. The agency is also delaying its pending ethanol assessment due to the complexity of the data.

The agency also memorializes its recent announcement that it is withdrawing its controversial draft assessment for the cancer risks of methanol because of concerns that the Ramazzini Institute studies the document is based on overstate potential risks.

And the agency says it is scrapping pending assessments for ceramic fibers and mirex because "they are no longer priorities for EPA." The notice also says it is scrapping a planned assessment for alkylates, which are found in gasoline, because there is not enough information to complete an assessment.

However, EPA notes that "If individual alkylates with sufficient data to support an IRIS assessment are nominated in the future, the IRIS Program will consider these nominations individually."

The notice appears to set the program's agenda for the coming year, though the agency says it will "accept information" related to the listed substances. EPA has said it plans to complete 40 pending assessments in fiscal year 2012, according to a January Government Accountability Office report, although it has only completed eight since the last IRIS agenda was issued in 2010.

The new agenda's release comes shortly after the NAS began preparing a comprehensive review of the IRIS program in lieu of congressional requests for the academy to review two draft assessments to determine whether the agency was complying with earlier NAS advice for reforming the program. In report language attached to EPA's fiscal year 2012 spending law, Congress had originally required EPA to submit its draft assessment of arsenic and up to two others to NAS, appropriators recently agreed to an NAS request to conduct a broader programmatic review.

Some critics of the program have suggested that EPA halt development of assessments until it has reformed the program but agency officials have argued that NAS never suggested such delays.

New Assessments

According to the notice, EPA between FY12 and FY14 is planning to launch 15 new assessments and reassessments, including those for antimony, carbonyl sulfide, chlorobenzene, decamethylcyclopentasiloxane (D5), octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane (D4), 1,2-dichloroethane (ethylene dichloride), diisopropyl ether (DIPE), tert-amyl methyl ether (TAME), 4,4'-dimethyl-3-oxahexane (TAEE), isopropanol, manganese, elemental mercury, methyl mercury, tungsten and its related compounds and elemental vanadium and vanadium compounds.

The chemicals were chosen from a group of substances nominated by EPA regions, program offices and the public that met "statutory, regulatory, or programmatic need based on the stated priorities of EPA's Program and Regional Offices; potential public health impact of the assessment; interest to other levels of government or the public," and for which sufficient data exists, according to the document.

Of those chemicals, only vanadium, D5 and D4 are substances that have never been assessed by the program. The other new substances have either been on the agenda but delayed because of resource limitations or are being reassessed.

EPA has previously sought to address vanadium compounds, which are used in air pollution reduction technology, and siloxanes, a type of silicone plastic used in medical devices and other products, though those efforts failed.

In late 2010, for example, EPA proposed a chemical action plan to better regulate siloxanes under its Toxic Substances Control Act authority. However, the proposal drew significant opposition from industry and other groups, who charged it would impose a significant burden given the wide range of products the chemical is used in, including manufacturing, medical devices production and the aerospace industry.

The agency in its IRIS agenda says that siloxanes were included at the request of two EPA offices and "met other criteria including high potential for impact on public health and widespread exposure and because of the opportunity afforded to perform a cumulative assessment of emerging contaminants."

The assessment for vanadium and its compounds likely stems from concerns raised by industry and a contractor-lead peer review panel that agency efforts to assess just vanadium pentoxide (V2O5) were flawed because of the quickly changing state of the metal, which is made from spent catalysts from oil refineries and power plants and is used as a strengthener in steel and titanium alloys. During a March meeting of the peer review panel for the IRIS assessment of V2O5, reviewers cautioned that the compound rarely exists in that state and thus EPA should either look at vanadium compounds as a whole, or be careful to stick to just V2O5.

The V2O5 assessment, however, will continue according to the 2012 agenda.

High-Priority Chemicals

Meanwhile, the agency says it is deferring decisions on several other high-priority chemicals that have been under consideration.

In the case of bisphenol-A, better known as BPA, EPA says it is "awaiting further analysis and results from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)] prior to determining whether Agency action under the Toxic Substances Control Act is required for protection of human health."

Similarly, the agency rejected calls from its offices and regions to conduct an assessment of lead, saying that it will wait until it finalizes later this year its pending Clean Air Act assessment of the ubiquitous metal for its ambient air standards and the completion of a National Toxicology Program study of low-level exposures, also expected in 2012.

EPA will use the conclusions in those documents to determine whether an assessment is needed, according to the notice.

The decision to defer its lead assessment comes despite growing pressure on EPA to better account for the risks of lead, which is known to have developmental impacts, especially in light of a growing body of evidence that shows there is no safe level of exposure to the metal. The agency's Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee recently urged Administrator Lisa Jackson to strengthen EPA's assessment and oversight of lead exposures and helm a new federal effort to limit exposures to the metal due to budget cuts at

other agencies.

EPA also says it will revisit in FY13 its plans to assess ethanol, the corn-based alcohol that is added to fuel, after it has the opportunity to assess the complexity of the data set for the chemical and consider how to conduct the assessment. The recent approval of a higher ethanol content in automotive fuel is raising concerns about the potential risks from leaking underground storage tanks. -- *Jenny Hopkinson*(jhopkinson@iwpnnews.com)

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